

Reclaiming Family Worship

We seem to be approaching a point of crisis in our culture. Our society's problem is not political, ideological, or philosophical, but spiritual in nature. It has its root in sin and exhibits itself in self-love. We are constantly seeking our own desires and gratification above anything else while relinquishing personal responsibility and ignoring the fact that there are consequences to our choices. Consider that with so many professing Christians, our society continues its dreadful decline as it continues to be ravaged from within. I would like to examine one of the symptoms of this pervasive problem; the absence of God from our homes.

Many of the problems in our homes can be attributed to the fact that our families are disconnected from one another and there is no worship in our homes. Perhaps if we actually began practicing our faith more we would begin to see its impact in the community around us. That practice should begin in the individual heart, is carried over into the home, and flows into our worship as we come together. Instead, we remain self absorbed, rushing about with the expectation that God will rush along with us showering us with goodness and happiness and warm feelings and of course plenty of material things. Small wonder that so many are frustrated or confused. Meanwhile the entrenched immorality of our society expands and our homes (not our houses) are falling apart around us. We truly seem oblivious to the need for living our faith in every facet of our lives.

While all of this is transpiring new church buildings continue to be erected throughout the land and church leaders continue to devise and implement clever new programs to attract larger crowds. The thinking seems to be let's get them by giving them what they want and perhaps we can convince them of what they need later. In our churches and homes we have bigger and better and more, but have become spiritually destitute. It appears that in our pursuits we are sacrificing our children on the altar of our vanity and the downward spiral continues. When we feel we are too busy to take time for God in our homes it is foolish to expect any other outcome. As a society we have become church-ed without being changed.

I'm speaking of the change that begins with the work of the Holy Spirit convicting the heart of sin through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and results in repentance from sin and faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. This BEGINS the new life of the Christian. It is not a one moment only transitory thing or feeling, but progresses for the rest of our natural life. We have become in reality followers and practitioners of the teaching of Christ and are enabled and empowered to accomplish this and to overcome sin in our lives by the power of God's Spirit. One of the outcomes of this change is a heart that worships God and desires to serve Him in obedience as a consistent practice. Worship is not so much something that we go to do, but is a continual attitude of the heart towards God. All this concerns the individual, but true faith goes farther onward. We are then to establish our homes as bastions of God's peace, rule, and worship by INSTRUCTING our children in the faith by the Word of God and by example (Parents, it is your responsibility to teach your children correctly about God, not the pastor or some teacher or director; you are the ones God will hold accountable). We then carry on to meet regularly with like minded believers for collective worship and encouraging and helping one another. Rest assured if our families are not coming together to worship in

the assembly they are not coming together to worship in the home. It is the deviation from this model which has brought about such terrible consequences in our society.

I believe church assemblies have become, albeit unwittingly and unintentionally, accomplices in the further fracturing of our homes and society. Allow me to point out just because a huge crowd is coming in doesn't mean it necessarily has God's blessing; with God it really is about quality and not quantity. Before you take umbrage please hear me out and prayerfully ponder what I'm pointing out. In creating programs like children's church and teen's church and the like we are continuing to splinter the home even farther. We have divided all these into separate groups in our assembly time with each group having their separate worship. We foster and deprive ourselves of the very thing that is unique and fundamentally necessary for a church to truly thrive with God's blessing-unity. This pattern seems eerily similar to the problems in the Corinthian church. The justification is people want to spend time and worship with others like them or want a worship style that suits them. First, I can find no scriptural precedent for different worship styles, but that's another discussion. Second, this may in actuality be what some want, but we are not in a position to cater to each one's wants but to give them what they need, and what we need is unity. There is to be no division in the church.

It is not that having different group gatherings or outings is inherently sinful or even wrong. What is needful is for church assemblies to consider the broader and farther reaching ramifications of what we're doing and perhaps change some of our approach. We don't need to throw the baby out with the bath water. For instance you have worship together at the set time for everyone, which is not only scriptural but vital and crucial to a true church, and the teens could perhaps forego a trip or an outing and could instead cook and serve a meal for the elderly members within the church. You have now brought in the aspect of service to one another and two seemingly disparate groups have come together to be better acquainted. I fear too often we are so focused on outreach that we overlook ministering to one another within the church. If we begin to show more of that love and unity within there is no doubt it will begin to flow outward.

A few more words regarding family worship in the assembly. I want to be clear that this does not mean having a different area or times of worship for every age group. This seems to be the interpretation of a "family oriented" church. Having a "children's" worship service while there is an "adult" worship service at another location in the church is an unscriptural invention of man. It is a relatively modern innovation that has become accepted as tradition. I am quite familiar with the common objections:

- It's disruptive to have small children in a worship service- Disruptive to whom? I'm pretty certain God knows we have children and what it's like to raise them (He has us doesn't He?) and since He's COMMANDED us to teach them right He can handle the occasional disruption. Besides, I'd much rather have the children with some noise than no children at all. I have to be honest- this reeks of selfishness to me.
- They can't understand- First, I think kids get a lot more than we give them credit for. Second, there is nothing wrong with a sermon or lesson devoted to them during the worship service. In fact I think this is a good

approach. With this the children are taught the Word and made to know they are an important, and not overlooked, part of the body. The adults and parents are also taught the Word on their level (which to be honest for many isn't very much higher than the kids). Parents then know exactly what their children have heard and could possibly !gasp! answer their questions. This children's sermon could be the basis for family worship and devotions for the upcoming week. But that's two different sermons in one worship service! Imagine that; we're putting more focus on Christ in the Word than other distractions. What if you were to go farther and add in a devotion and psalm singing and more prayer with the reading and expounding of the Word of God? What are we thinking? As a pastor I consider it part of my duty to foster and maintain an environment where first and foremost Christ is exalted, the children are nurtured in the Word of God, and adults/ parents are encouraged and taught how to live their faith in all facets of their lives.

- The children won't sit still/ behave for that long- I think certain accommodations can be made within the service, beginning with our attitudes. Besides, how are they going to learn and who's going to teach them? Do you really want to pursue this line of thinking? You are the parent and God expects you to be teaching them. Many people are sending their kids to a children's church because they see it as free childcare for a while with a side benefit that the kids might learn something about God. For me as a pastor it is a wonderful thing to hear those small voices as they join in the hymn singing or to see a small hand wave at me from the pews.

When are we going to reassume our responsibility of teaching our Children about God in our Homes? When are we going to restore family worship in our assemblies? I pray that you will seriously ponder what I've written and that together we can change and impact society through our faith in Christ. I'll leave you with a few scriptures for meditation:

Genesis 18:19
Exodus 12:26-27
Exodus 13:14-15
Deuteronomy 4:9-10
Deuteronomy 6:2
Deuteronomy 11:19
Psalm 78:3-6
Proverbs 22:26
Ephesians 6:4
2 Timothy 3:15

in the Love of Christ,
Pastor J